Application for United States Letters Patent

for

Temperature Dependent Regulation of Threshold Voltage

by

James W. Tschanz

Mircea R. Stan

Siva G. Narendra

Vivek K. De

Prepared by:

Seth Z. Kalson
Intel Corporation
2200 Mission College Blvd.
Santa Clara, CA 95052-8119

"Express Mail" mailing label number: EV409361798US
Date of Deposit: March 2, 2004
I hereby certify that I am causing this paper or fee to be deposited with the United States Postal Service "Express Mail Post Office to Addressee" service on the date indicated above and that this paper or fee has been addressed to Mail Stop Patent Application, Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

Anne Collette
(Typed or printed name of person mailing paper or fee)

Anne Collette
(Signature of person mailing paper or fee)

March 2, 2004
(Date signed)

Temperature Dependent Regulation of Threshold Voltage

Field

[0001] The present invention relates to circuits, and more particularly, to analog circuits to provide a transistor body bias voltage.

Background

[0002] Circuits on a die may experience a wide temperature range, where changes in temperature may be both spatial and temporal in nature. This may be of concern in a computer system such as that illustrated in Fig. 1, where die **102** comprises a microprocessor with many sub-blocks, such as arithmetic logic unit (ALU) **104** and on-die cache **106**. Die **102** may also communicate to other levels of cache, such as off-die cache **108**. Higher memory hierarchy levels, such as system memory **110**, are accessed via host bus **112** and chipset **114**. In addition, other functional units not on die **102**, such as graphics accelerator **116** and network interface controller (NIC) **118**, to name just a few, may communicate with die **102** via appropriate busses or ports. Each of these functional units may physically reside on one die or more than one die. Some or parts of more than one functional unit may reside on the same die.

[0003] As operating frequency and transistor integration increase, one or more die used in the computer system of Fig. 1 may experience a wide range of temperatures. This may be of particular concern, but not limited to, microprocessors. The spatial variation in temperature may occur because some circuits (functional blocks) on a microprocessor die may be more active than other circuits (functional blocks) on the same die, thereby consuming more power and leading to so-called "hot spots" on the die. The temporal variation in temperature may occur because some functional units on a die are switched on or off, thereby causing a temporal change in power consumption.

[0004] A temperature change in a transistor, unless compensated for, will change the threshold voltage as well as carrier mobility of the transistor. As temperature decreases, the magnitude of the threshold voltage and carrier mobility increase. This will affect both the OFF (or leakage) current I_{OFF} of the transistor as well as the ON current I_{ON} of the transistor. The effect of temperature change on I_{OFF} is more severe than that of I_{ON}. But the ratio of I_{ON}/I_{OFF} affects performance robustness. Consequently, circuit

designers usually try to keep this ratio greater than some minimum value, e.g., on the order of 100 to 1000, by designing a circuit to operate at its worst-case I_{ON}/I_{OFF} ratio, corresponding to its expected maximum temperature. But when the temperature is lower than its expected maximum, a circuit designed for its worst-case I_{ON}/I_{OFF} ratio will not operate optimally, unless other changes are made to the circuit parameters.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0005] Fig. 1 illustrates a computer system.

[0006] Fig. 2 illustrates a cross-sectional view of a body biased pFET.

[0007] Fig. 3 illustrates a circuit according to an embodiment of the present invention utilizing biased nFETs.

[0008] Fig. 4 illustrates a particular implementation of the embodiment of Fig. 3.

[0009] Fig. 5 illustrates a circuit according to an embodiment of the present invention utilizing biased pFETs.

[0010] Fig. 6 illustrates a circuit according to another embodiment of the present invention utilizing biased nFETs.

[0011] Fig. 7 illustrates a circuit according to another embodiment of the present invention utilizing biased pFETs.

Description of Embodiments

[0012] Because carrier mobility increases with decreasing temperature, a circuit designed for its worst-case I_{ON}/I_{OFF} ratio may be made to operate faster by increasing its clock frequency to take advantage of the increased carrier mobility. However, even greater gains in circuit operation frequency than this may be realized by modulating the threshold voltage as a function of temperature. This can be accomplished by changing the body biasing of transistors as temperature changes. For example, if no changes in body biasing is made, then as temperature decreases, I_{OFF} decreases significantly due to an increase in the magnitude of the threshold voltage. As a result, unless otherwise compensated for, a circuit will operate at a larger I_{ON}/I_{OFF} ratio than necessary. Embodiments of the present invention change the body biasing so as to reduce the magnitude of the threshold voltage when temperature decreases, so that the I_{ON}/I_{OFF} ratio may be brought back (or closer) to the design point (worst-case I_{ON}/I_{OFF} ratio). The frequency of operation of the circuit may then be increased because of the reduction in the magnitude of the threshold voltage. Therefore, by modulating threshold voltage to maintain a fixed I_{ON}/I_{OFF} ratio as temperature changes, the frequency may be maximized for a given temperature.

[0013] Embodiments of the present invention generate a body bias voltage to decrease the magnitude of the threshold voltage when temperature decreases, and to increase the magnitude of the threshold voltage when temperature increases. The body bias may be applied to pFETs, nFETs, or both types of transistors. For example, shown in Fig. 2 is a simplified, cross-sectional view of a pFET using a n-well CMOS process. Substrate **202** is a p-substrate in which n-well **204** (the "body") has been formed. Formed within n-well **204** are source/drain terminals **206**. Gate **208** is insulated from n-well **204** by insulator **210**. A body terminal (n^+ region **212**) is formed within n-well **204** so that the body may be biased at some voltage, denoted as Vbp in Fig. 2. Fig. 2 is simplified in that not all layers are shown. (For example, for simplicity, passivation layers are not shown, nor are contacts to source/drain terminals shown.) Any suitable process technology may be utilized to form the transistor of Fig. 2.

[0014] Preferably, Vbp should be chosen so as to prevent turning ON the parasitic junction diode formed by the source/drain terminals and the n-well. Typically, the body

bias voltage is in the range (Vcc – 500mV) to (Vcc + 500mV), where Vcc is the supply voltage. The lower end of the range represents forward body biasing so as to decrease the magnitude of the threshold voltage, whereas the upper end of the range represents reverse body biasing so as to increase the magnitude of the threshold voltage.

[0015] In the case of body biasing a nFET, a p^+ region is formed in the channel of a nFET to serve as a body terminal. Again, the body bias voltage should be chosen so as to prevent turning ON the parasitic junction diode formed by the source/drain terminals and the p-substrate. Typically, the body bias voltage is in the range (Vss – 500mV) to (Vss + 500mV), where Vss is the ground of the circuit. The lower end of the range represents reverse body biasing so as to increase the magnitude of the threshold voltage, whereas the upper end of the range represents forward body biasing so as to decrease the magnitude of the threshold voltage.

[0016] An embodiment circuit for body biasing nFETs is shown in Fig. 3, providing at output port **302** the bias voltage Vbn to bias the body or bodies of one or more nFETs in another circuit, such as, for example, a functional unit block within a microprocessor. In the circuit of Fig. 3, current mirror **304** provides a gain of *A* and is biased by nFET **312**. The gate of nFET **312** is connected to its drain so that it is biased at I_{ON}. Current mirror **306** provides a gain of *B* and is biased by nFET **314**. The gate of nFET **314** is connected to its source so that it is biased at I_{OFF}. Transistors **312** and **314** are placed relatively close to each other, and to the circuit to be biased, so that they are essentially at the same temperature as the circuit to which Vbn is applied.

[0017] In general, transistors **312** and **314** need not have the same width or length. However, it is preferable that they have the same length as each other, and the same length as the transistors to be biased, so that I_{ON} and I_{OFF} track temperature in the same way. If transistors **312** and **314** do not have the same width, then this should be taken into account when setting the current mirror gains so as to realize the desired I_{ON}/I_{OFF} ratio. This will be discussed in more detail later. For the present discussion, assume that transistors **312** and **314** have the same width and length.

[0018] The combination of OPAMP **318** and resistors **320** and **322** provide the input-output functional relationship $Vbn = (1+R_2/R_1)V_1 - (R_2/R_1)V_0$, where R_2 and R_1 are the resistances of resistors **322** and **320**, respectively, V_1 is the voltage at node **316**

(which is the input port of OPAMP **318**), and V_0 is an offset voltage provided at input port **324**. The circuit design parameters R_1, R_2, and V_0, as well as *A* and *B*, among others, are chosen so that Vbn is in the range (Vss – 500mV) to (Vss + 500mV).

[0019] The significance of the current mirror gains is that the path from node **316** through the amplifier comprising OPAMP **318** and resistors **320** and **322**, to the body terminals **308** and **310** of nFETs **312** and **314**, respectively, and to node **316** via the current mirrors, comprises a negative feedback loop such that under steady state $AI_{ON} = BI_{OFF}$. When steady state is reached, it is also assumed that there is thermal equilibrium, or near thermal equilibrium, locally so that nFETs **312** and **314** are at a well-defined temperature. Thus, *A* and *B* are chosen to set the I_{ON}/I_{OFF} ratio, that is, under steady state $I_{ON}/I_{OFF} = B/A$. (This assumes that the various current mirrors are operating in their saturation regions so that current mirrors **304** and **306** are providing constant gains *A* and *B*, respectively, and that the other circuit parameters, such as R_2, R_2, V_0, etc., are properly chosen.)

[0020] To describe the negative feedback, suppose the circuit has stabilized at a constant temperature so that $AI_{ON} = BI_{OFF}$. Now suppose there is a sudden decrease in the temperature at nFETs **312** and **314**. This will tend to cause a decrease in I_{ON} and a much more significant decrease in I_{OFF}, so that now $AI_{ON} > BI_{OFF}$ and the ratio I_{ON}/I_{OFF} has increased relative to its steady state value. But with current mirror **304** trying to source AI_{ON} into node **316**, and with the current mirror comprising nFETs **326** and **328** trying to sink BI_{OFF} from node **316**, where $AI_{ON} > BI_{OFF}$, the voltage at node **316** will rise. But a rise in this voltage at node **316** will cause a rise in Vbn at output port **302**, which is fed back to body terminals **308** and **310**. This will increase the forward body bias of nFETs **312** and **314**. This increase in forward body bias will decrease the effective threshold voltage of nFETs **312** and **314**, which will cause an increase in I_{ON} and a much more significant increase in I_{OFF} so as to decrease the ratio I_{ON}/I_{OFF}.

[0021] Thus, with a sudden temperature decrease that causes an increase in I_{ON}/I_{OFF}, negative feedback will decrease I_{ON}/I_{OFF}. Similar reasoning will show that with a sudden temperature increase that causes a decrease in I_{ON}/I_{OFF}, negative feedback will increase in I_{ON}/I_{OFF}. Consequently, there is negative feedback such that a change in

I_{ON}/I_{OFF} is countered by an opposite change in I_{ON}/I_{OFF}, and the steady state is $AI_{ON} = BI_{OFF}$.

[0022] Current mirrors **304** and **306** may be single-stage current mirrors, but they may also each comprise more than one stage in order to achieve I_{ON}/I_{OFF} ratios of 100 to 1000. An embodiment of these current mirrors is provided in Fig. 4. Here, the combination of transistors **402**, **404**, **406**, **408**, **410**, and **412** realize current mirror **304**; and the combination of transistors **414** and **416** realize current mirror **306**. Note that transistors **418** and **420** could be lumped together with transistors **414** and **416** so that the combination of transistors **414**, **416**, **418**, and **420** realize a current mirror. That is, referring to Fig. 3, transistors **326** and **328** and current mirror **306** could be considered together as a current mirror.

[0023] An embodiment providing a bias voltage Vbp to bias pFETs is shown in Fig. 5. Current mirror **502** is biased by pFET **504**, which has its gate connected to its source to provide a source-drain current I_{OFF}. Current mirror **506** is biased by pFET **508**, which has its gate connected to its drain to provide a source-drain current I_{ON}. Note that the current mirrors in Fig. 5 are configured so that a current BI_{OFF} is sourced to node **510** and a current AI_{ON} is sunk from node **510**. Node **510** is connected to the non-inverting input port of OPAMP **512**, and OPAMP **512** and resistors **514** and **516** are configured to provide the same input-output functional relationship as their counterparts in Fig. 3. However, the values of resistors **514** and **516**, as well as the offset voltage V_0 at input port **518** will not, in general, have the same values as their counterparts in Fig. 3. The bias voltage Vbp is provided at output port **520**, which is fed back to the body terminals **522** and **524** of pFETs **504** and **508**, respectively.

[0024] Similar reasoning as considered with respect to Fig. 3 will shown that the path from node **510** through the amplifier comprising OPAMP **512** and resistors **514** and **516**, to the body terminals of pFETs **504** and **508**, and to node **510** via the current mirrors provides negative feedback so that the circuit of Fig. 5 has a steady state condition such that $AI_{ON} = BI_{OFF}$. Again, as discussed with respect to Fig. 3, the current mirrors in Fig. 5 may comprise single stage or multiple stage current mirrors.

[0025] Various modifications may be made to the disclosed embodiments without departing from the scope of the invention as claimed below. For example, Figs. 6 and 7

provide alternate circuits for providing bias voltages Vbn and Vbp, respectively. Note that in Figs. 6 and 7, a voltage source follower precedes the OPAMP configuration. In this way, nodes **602** and **702** are not loaded and negative feedback is provided as discussed with respect to the previously disclosed embodiments.

[0026] As another example of a modification to the disclosed embodiments, programmability may be built into the disclosed circuits to allow tuning under various process conditions. For example, current mirrors **304** and **306** in Fig. 3, as well as the other current mirrors in the other disclosed embodiments, may be made programmable by switching various transistors into the current mirrors to vary current mirror gain. This would allow specification of the I_{ON}/I_{OFF} ratio after die fabrication. Also, the OPAMP may also be tuned to apply the correct bias voltage for a given temperature. This could be achieved by varying the offset voltage applied to one of the OPAMP input ports.

[0027] As discussed previously, transistors **312** and **314** need not have the same width. For example, we could let I_{ON} and I_{OFF} represent the ON-current and leakage current per unit transistor width, respectively. Consider Fig. 3 again. Letting W_{ON} denote the width of transistor **312** and W_{OFF} the width of transistor **314**, a current $AW_{ON}I_{ON}$ is sourced to node **316** and a current $BW_{OFF}I_{OFF}$ is sunk from node **316**. Then, the circuit sets $AW_{ON}I_{ON} = BW_{OFF}I_{OFF}$ so that now $I_{ON}/I_{OFF} = BW_{OFF}/AW_{ON}$. Thus, in the previous circuit descriptions, one may replace A with AW_{ON} and B with BW_{OFF} with the interpretation that I_{ON} is the ON-current per device width and I_{OFF} is the leakage current per device width. The widths and current gains are chosen so that the ratio BW_{OFF}/AW_{ON} provides the desired ratio of ON-current per device width to leakage current per device width.

[0028] It is to be understood in these letters patent that the meaning of "*A* is connected to *B*" (*A* and *B* as used here are phrases, not the current mirror gains) is that *A* and *B* are connected by a passive structure for making a direct electrical connection so that the voltage potentials of *A* and *B* are substantially equal to each other. For example, *A* and *B* may be connected by way of an interconnect, transmission line, etc. In integrated circuit technology, the "interconnect" may be exceedingly short, comparable to the device dimension itself. For example, the gates of two transistors may be connected to

each other by polysilicon or copper interconnect that is comparable to the gate length of the transistors.

[0029] It is also to be understood that the meaning of "*A* is coupled to *B*" is that either *A* and *B* are connected to each other as described above, or that, although *A* and *B* may not be connected to each other as described above, there is nevertheless a device or circuit that is connected to both *A* and *B*. This device or circuit may include active or passive circuit elements. For example, *A* may be connected to a circuit element which in turn is connected to *B*.

[0030] It is also to be understood that the term "current mirror" may include a single stage current mirror, or a multiple stage current mirror.

[0031] It is also to be understood that various circuit blocks, such as current mirrors, amplifiers, etc., may include switches so as to be switched in or out of a larger circuit, and yet such circuit blocks may still be considered connected to the larger circuit because the various switches may be considered as included in the circuit block.